

# RollPlay

GM  
NOTEBOOK  
ISSUE 1

**Text:** Adam Koebel

**Art Direction/Layout:** Daniel Weijden (LiveSpace)

**Illustrations:** David Stokes

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**Patrons. Welcome to the first issue of the GM's Notebook**, a RollPlay supplemental guide to all the stuff that happens behind the screen. **Thank you so much for your support.** We hope that this stuff will show you a little bit of what I do as the GM of RollPlay to prep for each show. Since we've just started a brand new campaign, this issue is going to focus primarily on Court of Swords, but future issues will dig into old notes I've got collected for Swan Song, Mirrorshades and Balance of Power. We hope that you'll give us feedback on things, and let us know what you like, so we can put more cool content out each month that gives you a behind-the-scenes look at the RollPlay universe.

**Adam Koebel**  
RollPlay GM

# COURT OF SWORDS SETTING NOTES

## Core Premise

The characters are Magistrates (agents tasked with traveling a circuit of towns and cities administering to the people there, in this case, specifically dealing with monsters and bandits, handing out judgement and dealing with corruption among the bureaucracy) of the Court of Sword, one of the four great powers of the world.

The Courts have divided the world and are, by lip service, predominantly allied with one another in accordance with the Precepts of the Arcana, the rules that govern the cycle of life, but in reality, often have border skirmishes, disagreements over land and resources, and have waged war on one another more than a few times throughout the history of the world.

The Courts are huge empires, like Rome in her prime, but the world is bigger still and there are many places in which the Courts have no towns or villages. This is where the Mara dwell - the forces of entropy and rejection of the cycle. Demons, monsters and others are all known as “Mara” and represent a terrible threat to the Precepts. It is the responsibility of all people to be wary and watch for the influence of these demons, be they marauding beasts or unjust behaviour manifesting the void.

Each Court is ruled by four infinitely wise undying beings who, when they die, are reborn and sought out to take their place at the head of the court. They are the Court and the Court is named in their honour. In each Court there is a King, A Queen, a Page and a Knight and whatever their gender,

species or disposition, the longer they live the more they become like their archetype. They rule with the absolute authority of the Arcana.

The Gods are distant and powerful, and represent the steps a life takes from ignorance to knowledge, from birth to death. They are neutral and uncaring and do not fight amongst themselves (though, with certainty, their mortal followers do battle with one another over various topics). Their priesthoods are shepherds for the stages of a life, and hold authority over every aspect of the life of all creatures. They employ no servants, they take no forms among the people, and their power is said to flow to mortals by way of The Fountain, a magical font in the centre of all the worlds.

There are three sources of magic - devotion to one of the many Arcana can grant the pious miracles with which to serve mortals and defeat the Mara. As well, the Fountain itself is said to grant magic to those who are born luckily enchanted or those who study its mysteries. There is some debate, especially among the more devout citizens of the Courts, whether mortals should ever attempt access to the Fountain without the guiding Precepts. Lastly, there are forces outside the cycle that can, if plied with promises, grant a form of magic that does not seem to come from either

the Fountain or the Arcana. Warlocks can make pacts with individual Mara, or other stranger things that lurk in the edges of the world. These are dangerous magics, and forbidden by the Courts (though it is said that the Court of Swords has been known to employ Warlocks to fight the Mara from time to time, as a sort of “fight fire with fire” solution).

## **The Court of Swords**

The Court of Swords is a military autocracy, and those who rule in the Court are bold, brave, brazen and bigger-than-life. Citizens of the Sword are encouraged to personal glory and to brave deeds in the face of danger. More than any other Court, Swords has come into conflict with the other courts over territory and resources, and most of the time, Swords is the aggressor. The Court of Swords is also most dedicated to rooting out and defeating the Mara, and is home to demon hunters and scholars of demonkind in most cities. They are a people of great fervour, and celebrate many festivals and prize competitive sports and personal achievement among their people. ■

# THE GODS



Name	Divine Overview
<b>The Fool</b>	beginnings, spontaneity, faith and folly
<b>The Magician</b>	action, consciousness, concentration, power
<b>The High Priestess</b>	passivity, unconsciouness, potential, mystery
<b>The Empress</b>	the mother, abundance, nature, the senses
<b>The Emperor</b>	the father, authority, structure, regulation
<b>The Hierophant</b>	education, cultural beliefs, conformity, the group

<b>The Lovers</b>	relating directly, sex, personal beliefs and values
<b>The Chariot</b>	victory, will, triumph of the self, hard control
<b>Strength</b>	endurance, patience, compassion, soft control
<b>The Hermit</b>	introspection, searching, guidance, solitude
<b>The Wheel of Fortune</b>	destiny, movement, turning points, personal vision
<b>Justice</b>	justice, responsibility, accountability, cause and effect
<b>The Hanged Man</b>	letting go, reversals of fate, suspending action, sacrifice
<b>Death</b>	endings, transitions, eliminating excess, inorexibility
<b>Temperance</b>	moderation, balance, health, combining
<b>The Devil</b>	obsession, bondage, the material, ignorance, hopelessness
<b>The Tower</b>	sudden change, catharsis, humbling, revelation, destruction
<b>The Star</b>	hope, inspiration, generosity and serenity
<b>The Moon</b>	fear, illusions, the imagination, bewilderment
<b>The Sun</b>	enlightenment, greatness, vitality and assurance
<b>Judgement</b>	decisions and hard choice, rebirth, hearing a call, absolution
<b>The World</b>	integration, accomplishment, involvement, fulfillment



# ELISOL NOVELS

## Starting The Campaign

**The Premise:** The characters are Magistrates of the Court of Swords (see the setting notes for more details) who have been tasked with following up on a missing Magistrate, one who was investigating a local village whose taxes had gone unremitted for several seasons. Their job is to find out what happened to the Magistrate and, if possible, rectify the peasants' accounting mistake.

**The Problem:** A former soldier and occupant of the village has come home and brought with him some very dire friends - the Mara. Captain Arrak val Khmaw, former soldier and current Necromancer has taken up residence in an ancient temple upriver and used the power of his demonic overlords to poison the river and kill all the villagers. Well, most of them, anyway. He has used their somewhat-unpredictable magic to make the most intact bodies into his skeletal servants. Between the undead and his vicious former soldier friends, Khmaw intends to use the power of the Mara to get what

he believes he has always deserved: control over this province and fealty as warlord. Though at this rate, he'll be lord over only corpses before long.

***Locations in the village:***

- The docks, where Arrak val Khmaw's soldiers and skeleton warriors are loading the "good" bodies into boats and bringing them upriver to be made into more undead servants.
- The temple of the Sun, the Moon and the World, where the local priest was crucified and whose halls are now defiled.
- The family home of the mayor, where the soldiers of Khmaw who occupy this village stay when they are on corpse management duty
- The mass grave, where bodies

are piled before being sorted into useful or un-useful piles

**Arrak val Khmaw's Lair**

A former temple upriver, now a ruin. This is where Khmaw and his underlings perform their unholy rites and raise his army of the dead. As well, this is where the Font of Dead Water resides, spewing black bile into the river to poison it. A real nice place.

***Encounter in the village:***

- Two survivors, Thuy and Samnong, young children who have survived in this hellish place
- Random "wild dead" who pick through the rubble, seeking things to consume
- Skeletal warriors, on patrol
- Animal scavengers (jungle dogs, giant rats, etc.) picking through the rubble, unafraid of the dead.

# PALE SUNLIGHT THROUGH MIST

## **Between Episode 2 and 3**

After leaving the fishing village, the Magistrates are headed back to Sự Phồn Thịnh, the largest town in the region. The town, they believe, is a safe haven where they will be able to protect their new charges - Thuy and Samnong.

## **Penitents on the Road**

On their way to Sự Phồn Thịnh the characters encounter Pale Sunlight Through Mist, a Monk who serves the Hanged Man and his disciples, Nisay and Phala. Pale Sunlight asks for a sacrifice of the travellers - something he calls a “sacred letting go”

If a character does submit to a letting go, give them a vision sometime later of a thing that concerns them - choose something from the Fronts and give them a warning sign.

## **Bugs in the Swampland**

The PCs come to a section of washed-out road, where the swamp has retaken the path. It is deep, but perhaps if they wish to walk through, they could. Either way, some very

large swamp bugs have nested here and the beetles are startled by those passing through their nest. The bugs are Fire Beetles in the MM, or as the locals call them “Giant Lantern Flies”

## **Bandits**

There’s a bandit problem around here. Throw some nasty jerks at the players, to illustrate that there are other kinds of monsters around, not just the, you know, inhuman kind.

## **Sự Phồn Thịnh**

**Population:** About 2,000

**Government:** A local Ayodoma family runs the town, with a council of family heads who assist in administrative matters.

**Defense:** About 50 trained soldiers, members of a local militia, plus defensible walls of stone reinforced with wood to protect against monsters from the local jungle.

**Commerce:** Sự Phồn Thịnh is built where the river crosses the local major road, and as such sees both land and water traffic. It is a relatively major trade hub for the province, and has most basic supplies readily available.

**Organizations:** The town has a single large temple that serves many of the more popular Arcana (The Emperor, The Empress, Justice, the

Wheel of Fortune and the World) and a handful of shrines to those less popular (Temperance, The Chariot, the Hanged Man) In addition, family organizations around certain trades have grown into pseudo-guilds. A small library serves as a Wizard’s School, though there are no apprentices currently being trained.

The city’s fortuneteller, a third-gender named Apinya, is well revered and studied at the College of A Thousand Fountains in Brasat Kiem. She technically serves the Lady Davi but is officially a public servant.

## **NPCs:**

*Lady Davi*, King of the local family

*Lord Chaya*, Queen of the local family

*Studios Golden Blossom*, Page of the local family

*Commander Visal*, Knight of the local family

*Administrator Mai*, a liaison to the government

## **FRONTS:**

### **The Necromancer**

- Arrak val Khmaw finishes harvesting the village
- The Font of Vile Water begins poisoning another village downstream

- His undead legion doubles in size
- Water traffic from downriver ceases altogether
- The dead are spotted outside Sự Phồn Thịnh
- Sự Phồn Thịnh is attacked by Arrak's legion
- Sự Phồn Thịnh falls to the Necromancer

### **The Kobold Menace**

- Postings of missing men and women grow in number
- Kobolds are spotted in the rice fields outside Sự Phồn Thịnh
- Farmers demand that the militia do something about it
- While the Family debates, whole farms are looted and burned
- Soldiers go looking for the kobolds, many die in traps set for them
- A famine befalls Sự Phồn Thịnh

- The Family begs the Court of Swords for help
- A team of Magistrates are sent, who deal with the problem

### **The Page's Illness**

- After a visit to a local fishing village to oversee a festival, the Page falls ill
- Doctors attempt to tend the illness, but cannot help
- The Page is bedridden
- Local priests call for a vigil and prayer ceremony
- The Family is informed that it is the work of the Mara, who are poisoning the riverlands nearby
- The Magistracy is called upon to send help
- The Page dies in their bed
- A season of mourning is declared

# NPCS

## Thuy, A Village Girl

### Card:

- Knight of Swords (direct, incisive)

### Alignment:

- Tejas (Fire)

### Three Things:

- Doesn't like being told what to do
- Too young to be so tough
- Highly protective of her brother

Thuy's role in the game is to show that even in the darkest times, there are those who will survive. She is full of anger and fury, but has a protective streak. She will always defend her brother, even through her own fear, and will never let anyone tell her what she can or cannot do. She is brave and bold and a bit hot-headed but is still a child. She wants desperately to get revenge for what happened to her village, though she has no idea what that vengeance might look like or how to obtain it.

## Somnang, A Village Boy

### Card:

- Page of Cups (Emotional immaturity, creativity)

### Alignment:

- Apas (Water)

### Three Things:

- Physically helpless
- Easily overlooked
- Knows many songs

Somnang is primarily present as a means to illustrate that the helpless need help, that there are soft things in the world for those of us who are hard to protect. He's weak, young and not very brave, but is blissfully ignorant of what's actually going on most of the time. He's a foil to Thuy's anger and rage. He's a simple boy, who wants nothing more than peace.

## Captain Arrak val Khmaw, A Necromancer

### Card:

- The Five of Swords (Loss and Arrogance)

### Alignment:

- Sunya (the Void)

### Three Things:

- Former Captain in the Military
- Led a life of hardship
- A pawn, seduced by darkness

Our first real adversary, the Necromancer Khmaw was once a soldier in the same army that Zephyra served in. He is full of rage at what he perceives to be the gods' ill will towards him. He is a native of the village he has defiled, and left when a storm destroyed his home and fishing boat. He joined the army, and rose to lead his men to several victories in the War of Eastern Providence, but was crippled in battle. On his way home, his anger and resentment drew the attention of the Mara, who gave him two things - the power to call up their dark magic and an

artifact called the Font of Dead Water, which he is slowly using to poison the land and raise the dead to serve him. He is followed by a handful of the most vicious men in his former unit, brigands and bandits who do the will of their twisted master.

Khmaw is here to show the warping power of the Mara - that he was once human, dealt a bad hand, and was twisted by the darkness of the void. I want to present a person who is still human, fundamentally, but whose bad choices have given him up to darkness. I'm excited to see what happens when the PCs come face-to-face with this guy, especially given what I know about Baern and Zephyra's respective pasts. ■

# HACKS AND RULINGS

## Races and Classes

- All from PHB.
- Genasi from Princes of the Apocalypse.

## Alignment

- Standard alignment is removed and replaced with one of five alternatives.
- Fire (Tejas)
  - + Direction: South.
  - + Associations: Anger, Will, Passion, Lust, Destruction, Desire, Purification, Protection, Strength.
  - + Colours: Red, Orange, Gold, Yellow.
- Air (Vayu)
  - + Direction: East.
  - + Associations: Thought, mental power, communication, travel, intellect, abstract thinking, teaching, divination, freedom, happiness, laughter, beginnings.

- + Colours: Blue, Pastels.
- Water (Apas)
  - + Direction: West.
  - + Associations: Emotions, dreams, compassion, love, sadness, healing, rest, cleansing, dissolution, rebirth.
  - + Colours: Green, Silver, Purple.
- Earth (Prithivi)
  - + Direction: North.
  - + Associations: Stability, prosperity, food, money, wealth, crops, animals, home, mountains, strength, grounding, protection.
  - + Colours: Brown, Black, Green.
- Void (Sunya)
  - + Directions: None.
  - + Association: rejection of authority, individualism,



selfishness, endings, nihilism, hopelessness, the present, temptation, solitude.

- + Colours: White.
- + The alignments otherwise act only to guide character behaviour and affect general stuff — they can be changed or altered as needed.

## Inspiration

- Remove all the bullshit for inspiration that exists there now.
- Add “Drive” and “History”
- When you do something to further your Drive, charge your Inspiration.
- When you do something to illustrate your History, charge your Inspiration.
- Discharge inspiration for Advantage.

## Bonds

- Each character has a Bond with each other character.
- A Bond is defined by a single Tarot card + a timeframe.
- Draw a card and note your Bond with that person.
- When you act in accordance to / in exploration of your Bond, roll

with Advantage.

- Your Bonds themes remain, but the details are up to you to work out.
- The characters can visit an NPC in the universe, a special oracle who can retell their fortune at a cost.

## Factions & Influence

- The party can earn influence with a number of powerful organizations.
  - + The Court of Cups (Water).
  - + The Court of Swords (Air).
  - + The Court of Wands (Fire).
  - + The Court of Coins (Earth).
  - + Servants of the Void.
- Influence is gained by specific acts and by completing missions.
- Influence unlocks special abilities, access to NPCs, etc. [Work Out Later]. ■

# CHARACTER ART





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